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Republican fight to protect Michigan from out-of-state trash nears success

Governor expected to sign legislative package today

LANSING – Michigan will finally have the out-of-state waste restrictions that residents have been calling for under legislation expected to be signed today by the governor.

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema and Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Chairwoman Patty Birkholz said the package sends a strong message about Michigan's desire to protect its environment.

"I applaud the governor for joining us in our fight," said Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "We have worked hard on this package to protect Michigan's environment and residents from being overrun and contaminated by waste from outside our borders."

The package imposes restrictions on the importation of Canadian and out-of-state waste, sets a two-year moratorium on new landfills, and gives broader authority to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to enforce these tougher garbage standards.

"This is a great day for Michigan," said Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Twp. "Stricter regulations and safeguards will protect our state from dangerous products that get dumped in our landfills."

The legislative package represents a bi-partisan effort to limit the importation of Canadian and out-of-state waste. Canadian and out-of-state-waste accounts for approximately 25 percent of all trash entering Michigan's landfills.

The bills provide a comprehensive revision of the state's solid-waste management laws to include additional protections against the disposal of inappropriate waste in Michigan's landfills.

The new rules require all Canadian and out-of-state waste to meet the same stringent standards Michigan has for its own waste. Landfills would be required to refuse any out-of-state waste that did not meet the tough standards.

The bills:

- Require the state Department of Environmental Quality to provide a statewide inspection program, which would mandate at least four inspections each year of each landfill to ensure compliance. Random inspections also could be conducted to help ensure compliance.
- Require landfills to refuse waste, regardless of its source, that did not meet Michigan's stringent waste standards, starting Oct. 1, 2004.
- Add two important new landfill bans beverage containers and whole tires to further reduce reliance on landfills and encourage recycling.
- Grant the DEQ director emergency power to prohibit any waste shipment that poses a threat to the public's health or safety or to the safety of the environment.
- Add new fines of up to \$25,000 per day for violating certain laws related to disposing of waste in landfills.
- Mandate a two-year moratorium on issuing certain new landfill permits.

Bill sponsors include Sens. Birkholz; Bruce Patterson, R-Canton; Nancy Cassis, R-Novi; Mike Bishop, R-Rochester; Alan Sanborn, R-Richmond Twp.; Jud Gilbert, R-Algonac.

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